



Amazing Grains

405 Main St. SW. Ronan, MT 59864 Tel: 406-676-3536

House Appropriation Committee
Chairman- Representative John Sinrud

Honorable Representative Sinrud and Committee members,

Thank you for this opportunity to express my support of HB 223- a bill that would support the establishment of an Ag Innovation Center Program in Montana. I would like to testify how the Montana Ag Innovation Center Program benefited me in the development of my value added agricultural business.

Amazing Grains is a value added business that converts Indian Rice grass, purchased from cooperative member growers, into gluten free flour products. With the assistance of Lake County Community Development Corp. and the Montana Ag Innovation Center Program, we were able to conduct a market analysis of the gluten free marketplace. This greatly assisted us in developing a new strategic plan for the company.

In closing, I urge the committee to pass HB 223. This bill will provide critical funding to maintain this program so other value added agricultural enterprises can be provided essential technical assistance to their development.

Thank you for your consideration,

Grace Lee

General Manager

January 21, 2007

Representative John Sinrud, Chair
House Appropriations Committee
Montana House of Representatives
Helena, Montana

Honorable Representative Sinrud and Committee members:

Thank you for the opportunity to express my support of HB 223 - a bill that would support the establishment of a permanent Ag Innovation Center Program in Montana. As a direct beneficiary of the services provided by Mission Mountain Market Cooperative Development Center, a part of the Ag Innovation Center Program, I would like to briefly share how this program has benefited us in developing our value added agriculture business.

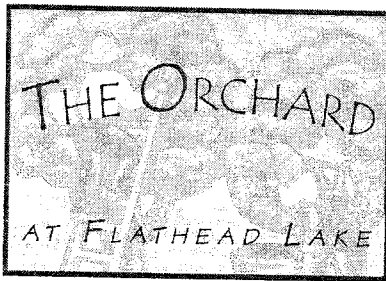
My husband, Albert Silva, and I own and operate Fat Robin Orchard & Farm, a Montana state certified organic cherry and apple orchard. As certified organic growers, our access to the conventional markets and co-ops are limited, and it is necessary for us to be more creative in marketing our already value-added fruit.

The Ag Innovation Center Program has assisted us in developing several value-added products (pitted and frozen cherries, dried cherries and apple juice) that we already have brought to market. In addition, it has provided us with business/product incubator services which are helping us create additional value-added products that will further expand opportunities to make our orchard an economically viable agricultural enterprise benefiting the farm as well as our community and state.

As a business owner, employer and proud Montana certified organic farmer, I urge the committee to pass HB 223. The critical funding provided by this bill will assist other farmers and processors in building value added agricultural enterprises utilizing the essential technical expertise provided by this program. It also will directly benefit and strengthen the rich diversity of Montana's agricultural community and help to ensure a bright future for our independent family farms.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Lise Rousseau Silva
Fat Robin Orchard & Farm
34126 S Finley Point Rd
Polson, Montana 59860



The Orchard at Flathead Lake, LLC
23126 Yellow Bay Lane
Bigfork, MT 59911
Ph: 406-982-3058
Fax: 419-858-2650
www.FlatheadOrchard.com

January 18, 2007

To: Montana House Appropriation Committee

Re: House Bill 223 Establish an Ag Innovation Center Program

Dear Committee Members,

We are writing this letter in support of the referenced bill and are in support of the establishment of an Ag Innovation Center Program in the state.

Our family has been in the cherry growing business since 1976. As some of you may be aware, this special portion of Montana's agriculture heritage is dwindling. Economic decisions have been the leading factor over the years attributing to the decline of the orchards in the Flathead Valley. It became apparent many years ago that added value products would be needed to aid in sustaining this agricultural livelihood. We have worked with Lake County Community Development Corp and the USDA MAIC program. As a result we have been successful in building a business growing, producing, and selling added value cherry products.

Without the program we would not have been able to make the leaps forward into this business venture while maintaining our desire to have a sustainable orchard. As many Montanans, we were subsidizing our farm with outside work. A continued Ag Innovation Center program gives us the hope of passing this farm to our family in generations to come.

Please vote yes and keep the support of agriculture programs going.

Thank you for your time and your continued support of Montana,

Gary & Heidi Johnson
The Orchard at Flathead Lake, LLP
23126 Yellow Bay Lane,
Bigfork, MT 59911

The Way Fruit Was Meant To Taste!

January 19, 2007

House Appropriation Committee
Chairman-Representative John Sinrud

Honorable Representative Sinrud and Committee members,

Thank you for this opportunity to express my support of HB-223 – a bill that would support the establishment of an Ag Innovation Center Program in Montana. I would like to testify in writing how the Montana Ag Innovation Center Program benefited me in the development of my value added agricultural business.

My business is called Ramrock Orchards. We have a 17 acre orchard in the Polson, Montana area that grows three varieties of cherries, i.e. Lamberts, Vans and Skeenas. Within this orchard, we produce approximately 80,000 pound per year whereas the majority of the cherries go to Monson's, a fruit processing company in Washington for shipment, in most cases, overseas and some of the smaller cherries are dried and packaged.

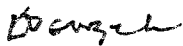
In addition, I am looking to plant another 3-4 acres of Sweethearts, i.e. a later producing cherry within the next year or two.

The Ag Innovation Center program assisted me in the following ways:

1. It gave me support and education of how some of the additional innovative products can be developed, i.e. different species for dry processing, packaging, etc.
2. Other opportunities using cherries in i.e. trail mixes, industrial uses for bakery products, using our cherries for production of fruit/grape type wines.
3. It supplied me with the technical knowledge of growing conditions, marketing, etc.

In closing, I urge the committee to pass HB223. This bill will provide critical funding to maintain this program so other value added agricultural enterprises can be provided essential technical assistant to their development.

Thank you for your consideration.



Edward A. Grzesik, Owner
Ramrock Orchards

Date: January 16, 2007

To: Legislators and Others reviewing HB 233

From: Lee McAlpine

It is my pleasure to write in support of the establishment of a state funded Ag Innovation Center Program. I have been the recipient of superb technical advice and financial assistance in growing my fledging hard apple cider business. Jan Tusick of the Ag Innovation Center in Ronan provided many analytical tools to assist me in developing a strong business plan to successfully launch my value-added venture, Montana CiderWorks. In addition, I receive a \$1,000 grant to purchase graphic design and printing services for bottle labels. Without Jan's enthusiastic and knowledgeable support I doubt I could have been able to pursue this venue.

There are lots of good ideas out there in the agricultural community to bring value-added products to market, but there are few people that have the knowledge to develop an action plan and the resources make it happen. That is where the regional value-added program plays a vital role. The Centers have stepped up to make a difference for the agricultural community.

January 22, 2007
Jerry Roseleip
129 Eastside Rd.
Deer Lodge, MT 59722

Re: HB 223 Ag Innovation Program

To Whom It May Concern;

The most challenging wall that needs to be climbed for new business is the wall of information needed to help develop the knowledge of feasibility. Very often, an idea is blocked by the lack of credible information to decide whether an idea can be developed into a profitable business.

Over the past several years the Ag Innovation Program has assisted Montana entrepreneurs with developing business plans and feasibility studies to help turn ideas into profit. It has been a valuable tool in linking people to information and hopefully success. During the course, it has probably saved some budding entrepreneurs a lot of money by telling them early that the idea needs to be adjusted or that it simply will not work at all.

The program has been a valuable tool and should continue to be funded by the passage of HB 223.

Sincerely

Jerry Roseleip- owner
Montana Natural Beef, LLC

House Appropriation Committee
Chairman- Representative John Sinrud

Honorable Representative Sinrud and Committee members,

Thank you for this opportunity to express my support of HB 223- a bill that would support the establishment of an Ag Innovation Center Program in Montana. I would like to testify how the Montana Ag Innovation Center Program benefited me in the development of my value added agricultural business.

In 1999 while farming east of Conrad Montana we decided that if we added value to our organic grain crops by making feed we might get a better return on our farming operation. Over the next few years we continued to add a few more customers without the benefit of a plan, any additional capital (besides a 1960's grinder and tractor) or advertising.

In 2005 we made 45 ton of feed, mostly with hand labor, old equipment – and still without the benefit of a plan or the financial resources to expand or improve the efficiency of our business. What we knew was that we could not continue making feed “out behind the barn”. We had to know if it was good use of our time, whether or not it was truly adding value to our grains and if there was any opportunity to expand to make this viable over the long haul.

The Montana Ag Innovations Center, principally Jan Tusick of the Mission Mountain Marketing Center, helped us apply and receive funding to support a feasibility study for our feed business. Through the process of the feasibility study and the study findings themselves we learned; what the market would bear, where the markets were, how much Montana certified organic grain we would need to ramp up operations, whether or not the grains were available in Montana, what equipment and materials would be needed and the level of advertising and management it would take to go to a 200 and then a 400 ton business in three years. As part of the feasibility study that was also funded in part by the Montana Department of Ag “Growth Thru Ag” grant program we also worked closely with MSU researchers on a facility design and expansion plan.

Since we completed the feasibility study we have indeed purchased equipment, rented space in an existing facility and plan to be on line with our new plant in February of this year. We are excited to be able to add value to other farmers' grains, add to an existing business stability by helping pay for a staff person to manage the day to day operations of our business.

We would never have completed the feasibility study without the expert support and financial resources contributed by the MAIC. We strongly urge you to support this bill so others may benefit from this tremendous resource in the future.

Sincerely

Jonda Crosby
Big Sky Organics LLC
DBA Big Sky Organic Feed